



An Investment In Latino Youth



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ASPIRA's Organizational Development

Accomplishments: Reflections

1983 - 1988

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*Formerly ASPIRA of America, Inc.

Associates: Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico

INTRODUCTION

The paper is written as an initial documentation of the institutional development of ASPIRA as an evolving national organization. Hopefully, this paper will have a positive influence upon future development of ASPIRA. Ideally, this essay will provide insights into the maturation process experienced by the Association, thereby preventing repetition of past institutional crises.

Furthermore, this paper will summarize the accomplishments of the national board of directors and staff during the author's tenure as national executive director. In this manner, the national board of directors will have an additional source of information to evaluate their own work as well as that of the national executive director and his staff. This summary takes an additional importance when one reflects on the fact that since September, 1983, the beginning of the author's tenure, over seventy persons have served on the national board most attending only one to two meetings. Only five board members who were on the national board then, are currently members.

While the focus of this effort is the five year period between 1983 and 1988, it will be necessary to draw upon ASPIRA's history. The author readily admits that, as in the case of all human history, his chronicle of events is subjective. However, written and oral history, subjective as it is, has often given impetus to change and improvement in our human activity and

condition.

This essay will be divided into five major parts: an historical perspective of the years prior to 1983; a period of organizational reflection, 1983-85; a period of renewal (1984-1988); ASPIRA at the crossroads and the new challenges it faces and; conclusions.

AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE TO 1983

The origins of Latino organizations in the United States, similar to the origins of the organizations of other ethnic and racial groups, are rooted in the need to correct the causes and effects of the nation's socio-economic and racial inequalities.

During the late 1950's and early 1960's the leadership of the Puerto Rican community of New York City, the largest segment of that city's Latino population, became aware that the long term solution to the many problems in the areas of housing, unemployment, health services, political representation, and educational services, required the direct involvement of the community. The need for additional talented and committed leaders with roots in the community also became evident. From this realization came the impetus to found organizations such as ASPIRA.

In 1961, a small group of community people convened in New York to discuss the socio-economic conditions of the Puerto Rican community, particularly the alarming dropout rate of high school students. Through their efforts, ASPIRA was formed as the first Latino non-profit organization in the United States dedicated to encouraging and promoting education as well as leadership development among Puerto Rican youth.

ASPIRA's founders were people immersed in the realities of their communities and who also possessed one of the salient characteristics of good leaders, namely, a deep faith in human

possibilities. They identified their needs and addressed them. Their ideal of community self-help remained deeply rooted within ASPIRA's mission, goals, and programs during its first decade. However, over time, the gradual fragmentation of ASPIRA encouraged several associates to perceive that each had a separate mission. In some instances, the mission was forgotten or became unclear.

The mission of an organization, particularly in the non-profit sector, provides its volunteers and staff leadership, employees, and participants with a clear organizational vision and direction. If the mission is unclear, or various organizational units have their own mission, organizational growth will be limited to short term accomplishments of the individual units of the organization, rather than long term major gains achievable through the collective efforts of all members of the organization. Geographic isolation between the organizational units further complicates the problem. To illustrate this point with ASPIRA as an example, geographic distance limited the personal communication which was and still is necessary for the development and maintenance of singular organizational philosophy, mission and goals in both theory and practice. Unattended, these conditions led to individual affiliate missions and goals which at best resulted in the loss of collective organizational opportunities and benefits that could have been achieved through the mutually supportive efforts of a larger number of people with one mission.

Individual affiliate missions logically led to goals and programs which were deemed necessary to attain those missions. Fragmented, each affiliate began to acquire a separate identity. For example, an affiliate (associate) saw itself as an educational agency and minimized leadership development because it was no longer "relevant." Another affiliate saw itself as a "juvenile delinquency prevention" program because its funds came from a related Justice Department funding source. Yet another was seen as a social service agency.

When founded, ASPIRA of America was established as "a national movement...[which bound] together in one national organization, affiliate agencies and a national office." As described in the 1972 By-laws, "the affiliates and the national office are ASPIRA of America which is one entity made up of local and national leaders, local and national staff and all ASPIRANTES."

This section will deal with some of the circumstances which led to the gradual erosion of a one entity, one mission organizational concept. Here we will cover such topics as issues of leadership, organization and structure. We will further elaborate on the Association and ASPIRA of America: the evolution of affiliates as separate entities including the national office as a separate entity referred to as "America." We will analyze issues of affiliate control as well as conditions which led to the 1976 board restructuring.

During its first seven years (1961-68) ASPIRA experienced exceptional growth. So much growth that Latinos in other cities perceived ASPIRA as an answer or a model in helping to develop their own communities. In 1968, the ASPIRA Association, which was then called ASPIRA of America, was established. The following year, new centers were established in Chicago, Philadelphia, and San Juan, Puerto Rico as part of the new Association. Consistent with ASPIRA's goal of local leadership development, these centers were established under the auspices of affiliate board of directors to whom was awarded the charter for the state or other jurisdiction in which the center was located.

The ASPIRA Association (ASPIRA of America, Inc.) also established a national board of directors on which each of the chairs of the four new affiliate boards of directors had membership. The ASPIRA of New York board, having served as the catalyst for ASPIRA of America, had more of its members on the national board of directors than all of the new affiliates combined. This situation was a source of continued organizational instability because New York board members served dual roles, controlling both New York and "America." In addition, another major drawback of the structural arrangement of the national board was that it sought to establish direct administrative control and supervision of the new affiliates through the national executive director. The issues of control and influence were of substance, since through most of its early years ASPIRA of America was able to successfully attract

significant sums of money from corporations, foundations and the federal government and distribute these funds to the affiliates. In retrospect, it appears that the initial structure and processes were inherently contradictory: that is, endeavoring to foster local initiative and leadership while attempting to establish central control of the affiliates. While the function of ASPIRA of America was conceptualized as the national office of the "ASPIRA Association" it in fact became a separate, often competing entity.

By 1973, all discussion about vision, mission and goals was gradually overshadowed by intense disagreements over issues of structure control, and distribution of financial resources. In part, as a result of these major disagreements, the first national executive director resigned, barely completing a three year tenure.

The second national executive director was hired. The issues of structure, control and purpose of ASPIRA of America were not resolved and; by 1976, "America" was clearly seen as a separate seventh entity competing for resources. The internal political forces converge; temporary alliances were built; and the second national executive director is unceremoniously forced into early retirement accompanied by the resignation of several board members.

The third national executive director was hired in 1976. In the same year the remaining board members were determined to correct the perceived organizational structural and control

deficiencies of ASPIRA of America and the national board of directors. The new board provided each affiliate with four representatives and allowed for two at-large members who, in theory, were to represent a broader national perspective. The name of "affiliate" was changed to "associate." The role of "America" remained relatively unchanged.

The new board structure provided the "associates" absolute control of the national board of directors of "America." Through the newly gained control, efforts were made to ensure that "America" did not act against the perceived interests of the associates. The perception developed years earlier that "America" was a separate competing entity remained firmly entrenched. Acknowledging this perception, the board attempted to define a separate "mission" for "America." The issue was not resolved. In the absence of clarity regarding the mission of "America", the national office staff continued to function much the same way it had prior to the board restructuring of 1976. The intra-association conflict took on a new form.

Prior to the 1976 restructuring, the locus of the conflict was primarily between the affiliate board and the national board, and secondarily between the affiliate executive director and the national staff. After 1976, the locus of the new conflicts was between the associates' staff and national board on one side, and the national office staff on the other. The issues remained much the same; control of local staff through national programs, distribution of funds raised by the national office and the

perceived raiding of associates' funding sources. The conflicts continued to take a toll on the energy of board members as well as national and local staff to the degree that there was little incentive left to deal with external issues which affected the entire "Association." The national staff assumed a besieged mentality with postures vacillating between defensive and offensive. Depending on which side you stood, the "enemy" was either "America" or the associates and the national board. Under much pressure, the national executive director retired in 1983.

PERIOD OF ORGANIZATIONAL REFLECTION, 1983-85

In September 1983, my tenure as the fourth national executive director of ASPIRA of America began. Pursuant to the By-laws and the Articles of Association, my responsibilities were to serve as chief executive officer of the ASPIRA Association. As defined in the Articles of Association, the "ASPIRA Associates . . . pursuant to these articles shall compose the ASPIRA Association, ASPIRA of America, Inc." It soon became evident to me that, in fact the so called "Association" did not exist. For the most part, what existed was a group of six organizations with the same ASPIRA name who convened, usually at the financial expense of "America," to protect themselves against the perceived incursions into their "autonomy" by "America." There appeared to be no central mission or focus other than the preservation and protection of the local ASPIRA organization. Let me explain this point further.

Prior to beginning my tenure, I was told that ASPIRA was in financial crisis, at the local and national levels. If the reality of the financial crisis did not fully register prior to my tenure, it became fully evident the first day on the job when it was brought to my attention that the national office did not have sufficient funds to meet national staff payroll for the second half of October, 1983. Transfers to associates were, on the average, six or more months behind and our creditors were calling every day. Some of the associates were also experiencing

similar financial problems caused, in part, by the national office. Something had to be done immediately. We instituted cost savings measures which included reduction of personnel and a four day paid work week for the remaining staff including myself.

Having understood the gravity of the financial crisis and that the national executive director had leadership responsibility for the financial health of the Association, which in my view included the associates; I initiated the drafting of a fundraising plan which would benefit the associates and the national office. In my ignorance that the concept of "Association" had long been dormant, I submitted the draft fundraising plan to the national board of directors for their review, input and approval. The resulting uproar made it clear that I had treaded on a very sensitive area in the relationship between the associates and "America." In my haste to resolve what had been defined as a financial crisis, I had not seen that a more fundamental crisis of organizational philosophy and purpose was perhaps at the root of the financial crisis. The message was clearly conveyed that my fundraising and development efforts should be focused on the national office. Other similar experiences such as the distribution of the surplus from the Hospital Insurance Plan of Greater New York (HIP) fundraiser, made it evident that ASPIRA faced fundamental problems of unclear or non-existent organizational philosophy, mission, goals, and roles. These experiences convinced me that "America" had been viewed for some time as a seventh organization and not the

organizational representation of the five associates and one affiliate. The crisis in philosophy and purpose and the resulting financial instability of the associates and "America" had torn the fragile Association apart. On the fifteenth anniversary of the ASPIRA National Movement, the only apparent benefit of belonging to the "Association" was the funds from the two health careers programs and even these funds had not been reaching the associates on time. At least two associates were, at some level, considering disassociating themselves from "America."

During the first months of my tenure, it appeared certain that ASPIRA of America might survive only six months. At best, left on its institutional and financial crisis course of 1983, "America" would have lasted twelve months. The most important question seemed to be whether "America" should be allowed to live in organizational agony. The "Association" was non-existent and "America" was seen as more of a hindrance than an asset. It appeared, that the negative views of the board and local staff members, regarding "America" had calcified. The national staff was demoralized, battle fatigued and very defensive in their relationships with the national board and the associates. A "bunker" mentality had developed among most national staff, and almost all were actively looking for other employment.

In order to understand the nature of the challenge we faced in the 1983 and early 1984, I identified as best I could, the specific pieces of the institutional crisis. These are

summarized below:

1. There was a perceived lack of Association organizational philosophy, mission and goals.
2. The roles and activities of "America" were unclearly defined.
3. "America" was perceived to be a burden by the associates.
4. "America" was perceived to be a competitor for financial resources by ASPIRA of New York, the oldest and most influential of the associates.
5. "America" was viewed as a separate seventh (at times competing) entity by some of the associates.
6. Lacking adequate program personnel, "America" did not provide consistent technical assistance to the associates.
7. "America's" staff was beleaguered, demoralized and defensive in their relations with the associates and the national board.
8. "America" had been experiencing a financial crisis for the past several years, resulting in a severe cash flow problem.
9. Transfer payments to the associates for the National Health Careers program were over six months behind, on the average.
10. "America's" financial reports showed a deficit of \$142,287 for June, 1983.
11. "America" had lost support from major grantors.
12. The credibility of "America" was being questioned by contributors.
13. The national board of directors was composed almost entirely

of delegates of the associates who usually saw their roles solely as representatives of the associates, making it difficult for them to assume or develop an Association-wide vision.

14. The national board of directors was not actively engaged in fundraising efforts at the national level.
15. The national board of directors did not appear to demonstrate an interest to become actively involved in national level fundraising efforts. Some board members expressed a conflict of interest with their roles on the local boards.
16. There were no at-large board members who could open corporate and foundation doors or actively involve themselves in fundraising activities at the national level.
17. The national board appeared reluctant to recruit such at-large members.
18. The Association relationship was defined by the Articles of Association, but important elements of the articles were not followed. These elements included the definition of the Association, the role of the national executive director and his staff, fundraising coordination, reporting, changes in local By-laws and others.
19. The national board appeared reluctant to enforce the Articles of Association on matters which required compliance by the associates, thus reinforcing the perception that board members were unable or unwilling to shed their local

delegate role and assume an Association or national role.

Yet, inspite of the internal institutional crisis, a ray of hope could be detected: a desire on the part of several members of the national board, some local executive directors, and other national organization leaders for an increased national level presence of ASPIRA. Thus evolved the challenge. To resolve the institutional crisis, to rebuild the Association and to establish a preeminent ASPIRA national presence.

With knowledge of the pitfalls ahead of us, several key board members, local executive staff and I identified the actions which we thought would be essential to the resolution of the institutional and financial crisis and to establish a base for growth. These were:

1. Clarify the Association philosophy, mission and goals.
2. Clarify the role of the national office.
3. Resolve the seventh entity perspective.
4. Develop a one ASPIRA Association vision among the ASPIRA members and alumni.
5. Resolve the level of conflict among the national board delegates.
6. Transform the board from a group of delegates representing usually only local interests to a national board with a broad national vision as well as local interest.
7. Increase the level of trust and confidence between

- local and national staff and improve our personal and written communications with associates staff.
8. Resolve the perceived conflict with associates in our fundraising efforts.
 9. Seek a truce with ASPIRA of New York.
 10. Resolve the national office cash-flow problem.
 11. Resolve the grave problem of late program transfer payments to associates.
 12. Eliminate the "America's" financial deficit.
 13. Resolve the \$89,000 debt to the Justice Department.
 14. Resolve the national staff morale problem.
 15. Provide special technical assistance to ASPIRA of Florida during its survival crisis.
 16. Determine where the national office should be geographically located to effectively achieve the ASPIRA mission and goals.
 17. Increase technical assistance to the associates.
 18. Re-establish ASPIRA's credibility with national level corporations, foundations, and organizations.
 19. Establish an annual plan and budget process based on the needs of the associates and the national office.

THE PERIOD OF RENEWAL, 1984-88

This part will focus on the period of renewal which began in mid 1984. We will discuss actions taken to resolve the institutional crisis. We will also discuss the rejuvenation that has occurred at the national level; the demise of "America"; and the rebirth of the ASPIRA Association in theory and practice. The theoretical and practical reasons for the relocation of the national office, as well as the gradual transition of the vision of the national board of directors, the council of executive directors and the national staff will be explained. We will also discuss the significant expansion of our national external relations; our new visibility and our marketing opportunities for growth and development. Finally, we will provide an overview of our newly established program and financial stability.

Paramount to the resolution of the institutional crisis was the need to clarify the ASPIRA Association philosophy, mission and goals and the role of "America" within that framework. Countless hours between mid 1984 and 1986 were devoted to this topic by the national board of directors, the council of executive directors, the national executive committee, the strategic planning committee and the national staff. After much disagreement, debate and reflection, a consensus was achieved: ASPIRA has one philosophy and mission. It is this singular philosophy and mission which unifies the individual associates into one ASPIRA. While each associate varies in the phrasing of

the philosophy, mission and goals, the substance is the same:

- Philosophy: Belief in the community's ability and potential to find solutions to socio-economic problems.
- Mission: To contribute to the socio-economic development of our community through our youth.
- Goals: - To develop the leadership and personal potential of our youth so that they contribute to the development of our community;
- To develop the intellectual and educational potential of our youth, and;
- To advocate for institutional change on behalf of our youth.

Having achieved a greater sense of clarity on philosophy, mission and goals, it was possible to revisit the issue of local and national roles.

As previously stated, the ASPIRA national office had acquired a separate identity which many referred to as "America." Some had even suggested that to resolve the institutional crisis it would be necessary to define "Americas's" mission. Had this happened, it would have reinforced the separate identity of the Association's national office. Indeed, what was of utmost importance was to return to the concept of one mission, one ASPIRA Association, and a national board and office which played a unifying role for the six associates. The painful memories of the internal struggles between the associates and "America" were still present. Clarifying roles would not be sufficient.

Major institutional surgery was needed. The negative feelings toward "America" had to be resolved if we were to be successful in our efforts to rebuild the ASPIRA Association. To effectively address the national level needs of a national association, the national office should be in an environment in which staff would have immediate access to national policy makers. The nation's capitol was the logical choice. This was the one place in the nation where several thousand non-profit associations and trade organizations had national offices. All dealt with national legislation and policy and formed coalitions around issues of mutual concern. All further served their constituencies by disseminating information, providing technical assistance and promoting national visibility and exposure.

However, some of us felt that the prospect of relocating "America" to Washington, DC would not suffice. Negativism toward "America" was still present. Major surgery required not only changes of roles and location, but also the reorientation of the national staff and ultimately the demise of ASPIRA of America and hopefully, the burial of a decade of internal struggles which kept ASPIRA from achieving its growth potential. Concurrently, we stressed a one ASPIRA Association vision at every opportunity we had. These included national board meetings, council of executive directors planning sessions, retreats, national staff meetings, speaking engagements, proposals, publications and visits to corporate and foundation funding sources. While not yet at the level we can achieve, significant progress toward a

unified ASPIRA vision has been made.

Next on the agenda, was the need to resolve the perceived fundraising conflict of interest with the associates, especially, with ASPIRA of New York. Angelo Gonzalez, the executive director of ASPIRA of New York, had begun his tenure only several months before me and thus was also anxious to resolve the issues between "New York" and "America." He wanted to focus on the development of "New York" and had little time to carry a grudge. We clarified our roles and we forged an understanding of non-competition, mutual support and respect. Similar meetings with Maria Vizcarrondo, Emanuel Ortiz, Victoria Hernandez, Carmelo Rodriguez, and Hilda Maldonado provided the basis for a gradual increase in the level of trust and confidence between the local executive directors and the national staff.

We also gave high priority to solving the national office cash flow problem and to improve the timeliness of our transfer payments to associates, thus helping the local executive directors with their cash-flow difficulties. I visited all national office funding sources and requested additional support. Some responded affirmatively. I researched our development files and discovered an old, forgotten, endowment fund made fifteen years before in the amount of over \$500,000. The picture started to become brighter. We would be able to eliminate the national office financial deficit. The national office would no longer be a burden on the associates. We were later able to favorably resolve the \$89,000 Justice Department debt problem.

Gradually, the tenor of the meetings with the national board of directors, the executive committee and the council of executive directors began to take on a more positive tone. National staff morale began to improve.

Limited as our national level resources were, we also gave high priority to ASPIRA of Florida in their efforts to survive. We provided more than the usual staff and board technical assistance along with special allocations of our limited funds. Some associates provided special loans to help "Florida" in their financial crisis. Indeed, the Association's objective of mutual support was beginning to come alive.

By August of 1985, we had dedicated almost two years of discussions with board members, national and local staff, financial supporters and heads of other national organizations. These discussions were summarized in a report entitled, Mirando Hacia el Futuro: A National Office Relocation Feasibility Study for the ASPIRA Association. At their August, 1985 annual meeting the national board of directors unanimously approved the strategic planning committee's recommendation to relocate the Association's national office to Washington, D.C. In addition, the board approved, in principle, the recommendation to change the name of ASPIRA of America to an appropriate name which would project a unified image. Major preliminary steps were thus taken on the road to rebuilding the ASPIRA Association in theory and practice. Persistence was bearing fruit.

The relocation caused the national office to lose all of the New York based staff with years of history and experience. The loss of these members caused significant disruption in the internal operations of the national office. While disruption was anticipated, the initial staff turnover delayed the return to normal operations. As in most moves, records were misplaced, or placed into storage. The loss of prior staff history and experience turned out to be a benefit in the longer view. Not encumbered with national staff resentment of the past, we were more readily able to build a new team with a renewed philosophy and vision of the ASPIRA future. Indeed, in the beginning, the new staff often wondered why I moved so cautiously. Nonetheless, soon after the relocation to Washington, program related fundraising efforts began to have positive results. The Ford Foundation provided a major grant for a new youth leadership development initiative; the U.S. Public Health Services reversed their previous decision to terminate the funding of the ASPIRA Health Careers Program; the NYNEX Foundation provided a grant to conduct a Hispanic needs assessment in the Northeast; and we received a major grant to study the policy implications of the Hispanic dropout problem. All of these grants increased the ASPIRA Association's national office staff capacity to provide increased technical assistance to the associates. We were able to integrate ourselves into the Washington information and influence networks to the added benefits of the associates.

Gradually, we have re-established ASPIRA's credibility with national level corporations, foundations and organizations. Members of Congress invite our thinking on many issues. We are now invited to participate in policy development by organizations such as the National Education Association, the Council of Chief State School Officers, the Independent Sector, the America Council on Education, the National Council of La Raza, the National Hispanic Leadership Council, the United Way of America and many others.

We have successfully recruited several dozen volunteers as members for three advisory councils to assist our national leadership development, health careers and advocacy research programs. The volunteers have successfully assisted the Association's national office in its development and program fundraising efforts. They have helped open doors and provided leads to possible new funding sources.

In the area of planning, we have established an annual plan and budget process which helps develop a consensus on the focus of the national office. The process was established in the 1984-85 fiscal year and has been further fine tuned each year. The plan outlines the mission and goals of the Association and the function and roles of the national office in their attainment.

Significant accomplishments were achieved by the national board, the council of executive directors and national staff during the 1983-88 years, particularly the resolution of the institutional and financial crisis. Yet, there are important

institutional growth goals which require the national board's attention. At our retreat of April, 1987, the national executive committee and national staff members met for three days to outline critical growth needs of the ASPIRA Association through the end of this century. From the retreat process, several salient desirable outcomes for the year 2000 were identified and are listed below in order of priority. They will provide the basis for our discussion of the following section:

1. Establish a strong financial base for all members of the ASPIRA Association.
2. Expansion of the Association to other geographic areas.
3. Expansion ASPIRA's program constituents.
4. Expansion within geographic area of associates.
5. Establishment of an ASPIRA Alumni Association.
6. Qualitative expansion of existing and new programs.
7. Political empowerment of the Association.
8. Annual National ASPIRA Association Conference.
9. Joint ventures with other public and private organizations.

The retreat participants acknowledged that the desired outcomes of the national executive committee were similar to the work initiated by the council of executive directors at their retreat of June, 1985.

THE CROSSROADS: THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

Serving over 16,000 young Latinos annually, employing 250 full-time staff members, and over ninety board members administering a combined annual budget of over five million dollars, and boasting well in excess of 100,000 alumni, ASPIRA is the largest Latino organization of its kind in the United States. It has the potential of becoming one of the most influential as well. Almost anywhere you go in the country, particularly in urban America, you are likely to find an ASPIRANTE or someone who closely identifies with ASPIRA. These facts should not escape the reader's attention, for herein are the essential ingredients for the empowerment of Latinos in the United States during the next generation.

The desired outcomes identified at the national executive committee retreat provides a challenging institutional growth agenda through the year 2000. Accomplishments of this agenda requires much work; the ability of the national executive committee to convey to the national and associate boards the vision of a bright future, will enable ASPIRA to attain its prize. The prize is the empowerment of the Latino community through ASPIRA. Once convinced of the vision, local and national boards must collaborate to chart a common strategy which will serve as a guide to all local and national volunteers and staff.

The conditions for ASPIRA's growth have never been better. The important question, however, is whether ASPIRA's local and

national leadership is prepared to accept the challenge not in response to a crisis, but out of foresight. Is the ASPIRA leadership prepared to change its methods of doing things if change is deemed necessary? Will the leadership have persistence and fortitude to stay on course? Will the challenge force the leadership to seek permanent refuge in the niche provided by the current organizational definition? Consider the following sample of potential issues which are related to each of the desired outcomes.

1. Development of a strong financial base

- o Is the national board of directors prepared to assume a major role to achieve this outcome?
- o Is the national board prepared to reorganize itself for the Association to become a financially strong organization?
- o Are associates board and staff leadership prepared to coordinate their fundraising efforts with other associates and the national office?
- o Ninety percent of all contributions in the U.S. are derived from individuals, eighty percent of whom having incomes of less than \$20,000 per annum. Are we prepared to do what is necessary to develop this sector as a major source of support?
- o Are we prepared to mobilize the potential fundraising strength of a coordinated ASPIRA Alumni Association?

2. Expansion to other geographic areas

Currently, ASPIRA has expansion opportunities in at least eight new states. Eight of the new potential sites are Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven and Waterbury, Connecticut; as well as Boston, Holyoke, Springfield and Worcester, Massachusetts. Other potential sites are Wilmington, Delaware; Cleveland and Lorain, Ohio; Baltimore and Silver Spring, Maryland; Providence, Rhode Island; Arlington, Virginia, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Each of these cities and towns have local Latino leaders which, like the ASPIRA leadership, volunteers and staff, are committed to the premise that Latinos possess the collective potential to solve the community's problems and contribute to its growth. This leadership, often relocated ASPIRANTES, represents a unique opportunity for the implementation of a broad community-based expansion effort.

Regardless of the community size large or small, their leadership wants a role in determining the future of the community. They want "ownership" of their institutions and are not likely to support efforts which are externally controlled. ASPIRA's inability to grow significantly beyond the first city in prior expansion efforts demonstrates an inherent weakness in our past expansion model.

The successful establishment of new centers requires the fundamental belief in community leadership. This belief

must be translated into a mutually supportive development process which provides the local community a major leadership, not just advisory, role. Additionally, obtaining and maintaining financial support from local government, corporations, school boards and United Ways requires a board and staff leadership which is locally based and recognized. In time of need, local political leaders and other financial supporters will respond to their local ASPIRA leader and not very likely to persons perceived as "outsiders."

Given this background, the following questions should be considered.

- o Will ASPIRA be consistent with its philosophy that a community has the potential to control its destiny as it seeks to expand?
- o Are successful expansion models developed by other major national organizations appropriate for ASPIRA's expansion efforts?
- o Can the ASPIRA philosophy, mission, and goals be safeguarded through affiliation contracts, while giving local communities a major voice in their center's operations?
- o Can local fundraising be effectively accomplished with more than one affiliate in a state? What type of coordination is required?

3. Expansion of programs constituents

Opportunities for the expansion of ASPIRA services to younger age groups are immense. Effective educational and leadership programs at the elementary school level will enable ASPIRA to work with youth before they make important decisions regarding their future.

4. Expansion within geographic area of Associates

As associates consider expansion efforts in their area of jurisdiction, consideration should be given to the issues discussed above. Additionally, some uniform model is required since the model used in one jurisdiction will affect the other ASPIRA jurisdictions.

5. Establishment of an ASPIRA Alumni Association

The foundation of an ASPIRA Alumni Association is critical to the growth of ASPIRA. Alumni can materially determine the outcome of funding decisions made by every conceivable grantor. Organized with great care and sensitivity, the Alumni Association and potential local chapters can serve as ASPIRA's growth network in the United States and Puerto Rico. An Alumni Association, with a potential size of over 100,000 members, can significantly affect major policy decisions at the local, state, national, and international levels.

6. Qualitative program expansion

ASPIRA will need to explore new approaches to addressing the needs of Latino youth. We must regularly reassess our ability to accomplish our mission and goals through our programs. We must develop mechanisms to assure program quality. We will need to establish program reporting procedures which will permit ASPIRA to report its Association-wide accomplishments.

7. Political empowerment of the Association

It was previously mentioned that while the ASPIRA Association, with over 16,000 young people and 250 staff members, is the largest organization of its kind, it has much to do in the development of its political empowerment. Other related desired outcomes will contribute to this outcome, but a well conceived and implemented plan is essential.

8. Annual National ASPIRA Association Conference

The advantages of convening an annual ASPIRA Association conference are numerous. Such a conference would bring together all ASPIRA boards, staff leadership, program staff, student leadership and alumni to deliberate on issues of community and institutional empowerment and matters of current concern. Agreement on organizational policy issues can more readily be achieved with all

interested parties present. With careful planning, the conference can be a unifying force for ASPIRA, thus further increasing our ability to attain our goals.

The most appropriate time to inaugurate the annual conference is the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the ASPIRA Association which takes place during the 1988-89 program year. The board committee designated to plan the conference needs to begin deliberations immediately, if we want this most important event to take place in 1989.

9. Joint venture with other organizations

This desired outcome becomes increasingly attainable as ASPIRA increases its financial and organizational strength. Other organizations will become interested in joint ventures with ASPIRA if they conclude that we have something to offer and that we have the organizational infrastructure to deliver on our commitments. A recent initiative with a major financial services company did not succeed, in part, because they perceived ASPIRA to be too organizationally fragmented.

Opportunities for meaningful national joint ventures with other organizations exist. The lingering question is whether we have the will to make a commitment and honor it. This is especially true if the proposed commitment involves the delegation of certain powers and responsibilities to the national board. We must be confident that as ASPIRA

unifies, while retaining self-government at the local level, it will become organizationally and financially stronger to everyone's benefit, especially the Latino community.

CONCLUSION

This paper was written as preliminary effort to document the development and accomplishments of ASPIRA as an evolving national institution. We have provided an historical perspective which, hopefully, will be of use and benefit to the present and future generations of ASPIRA executive staff and volunteers.

The ASPIRA Association has come a long way in five short years. Financially, we are stronger than we have been in many years. Organizationally, we are probably stronger than we have ever been. We are clearly, one ASPIRA, with six associates and a national office. We have one unifying philosophy and mission. Simultaneously, we are able to respond to the diverse needs of our community wherever we are located. We are the largest Latino community based national organization when measured by the number of staff and financial resources at our disposal.

The credit for ASPIRA's success in overcoming its institutional crisis can be attributed to the commitment and dreams of many volunteers, staff, students, and alumni who are ASPIRA and believe in ASPIRA's philosophy, mission and goals.

Yet, there is much work to be completed in our collective efforts to develop ASPIRA to its organizational potential. Some of this work was outlined in this essay. Additional clarity will be attained as we proceed with our development efforts.

Of all the challenges the national and local boards face, the most difficult, yet most exciting, are the expansion

opportunities. As we approach these challenges, we must keep ever present that ASPIRA is an empowerment agent. Whatever mechanisms we use for expansion must be philosophically consistent with our empowerment role. If we remain consistent, we may not have to repeat some of the history we would rather forget. These are the crossroads: the ASPIRA challenge.